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ABSTRACT

A telephone survey of 1,487 adults in 91 nonmetropolitan areas of Tennessee was conducted to determine the nonmetropolitan newspaper audience, the exposure and effectiveness of nonmetro newspaper advertising, and the complementary relationship of advertising media, particularly newspapers and television, in nonmetropolitan markets. The results showed that the newspaper was an important communications medium to nonmetro audiences. The nonmetro newspaper market was shown to be extensive and of high socioeconomic quality. Advertising exposure was high, and advertising content was widely read and persuasively effective. In addition, nonmetro readers were shown to use the advertising in various media, particularly television and newspapers, deliberately and purposively by capitalizing on their complementary qualitites. (FL)

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NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING IMPACT IN NON-METROPOLITAN MARKETS

By

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The basic objectives of this paper are to describe: (1) the non-metropolitan (non-metro) newspaper audience, (2) the exposure and effectiveness of non-metro newspaper advertising, and, (3) the complementary relationship of advertising media, particularly newspapers and television, in non-metropolitan markets.

Need for Non-Metro Data

Newspaper readership studies are certainly not new. One source (Tankard, 1972) identified the first of the polls as those taken by newspapers in North Carolina and Delaware which measured pre-election preferences in the 1824 presidential campaign. But, not withstanding the major contributions of Dr. Gallup beginning in the mid-1920's, the rise of sophisticated and scientific research of newspaper audiences is relatively recent--dating to the mid-1960's (Ismach, 1979).

The rise in newspaper research activity and competence however has been limited primarily to the major metropolitan areas. These studies have been sponsored by individual newspapers, newspaper chains, and industry groups such as the American Newspaper Publishers Association. For the most part, the studies have been highly selective, usually dealing with the audiences of a few specific newspapers. Readership studies of many communities across large geographic areas are not yet common.

This dearth of newspaper readership data has not gone unnoticed by the advertising industry. One study was conducted because "media buyers wanted much more detailed data on audience reach and audience demographics than they are currently getting from newspapers" (Larkin

& Hect, 1979). Some agency representatives are downright hostile about the lack of newspaper readership data (Heimberg, 1979).

But, things are looking up. Several pioneering press associations--those of Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Wisconsin--have recently sponsored statewide readership surveys (see, for example, Larkin and Hect, 1979 and Lynn and Bennett, 1979). These data from the small towns, rural communities, and farms are necessary to complete the picture of newspaper readership and advertising impact that had emerged only from major urban areas. Also, computer-based data banks are being compiled which will offer advertisers in-depth views of newspaper readers in a variety of geographic locations (Marketing & Media Decisions, 1979).

The newspaper audiences of Tennessee's four major metropolitan areas have been examined on a regular basis. These four areas (Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga) have a combined population of 1,700,420 (Tennessee Newspaper Directory, 1979). However, most Tennessean's live in the smaller communities. Fifty-seven percent of the State's total population, 2,223,562, live in non-metro Tennessee. This is the forgotten audience; prior to the study reported here, there had never been a statewide newspaper readership study in Tennessee.

Although non-metro markets have not heretofore been examined on a broad basis, several studies of small towns have found unique relationships between readers and their newspapers (Shaw, 1978, Shaw & Riffe, 1979).

It is becoming clear that there is more to defining a media audience than its demographic characteristics. The audience is not merely a collectivity of age, sex, and occupational categories which pose passively

as targets for media messages. The audience is active and purposeful in its use of the media. Media satisfy different audience needs and, therefore, are complementary rather than competitive in the minds of the audience.

Use of Media

Contemporary media-use research is based on the premise that the audience is an active discriminator among media content rather than a passive target for messages (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Also called "information-seeking" theory (Trodahl, 1965), the so-called uses and gratifications research relies heavily on the intuitively-sound notion that media-use is a function of audience need satisfaction (Becker, 1976). Moreover, different media satisfy different needs (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972; Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973; Edelstein, 1974; Weaver, Wilhoit & Riede, 1979; Becker, Fruit, & Collins, 1979).

Although this theory is cited as one of the most promising explanations of media use (Dennis, 1978), it is not without controversy, especially on the bases of conceptualization and definition (Swanson, 1977). Nonetheless, this approach to understanding media-use behavior seems destined to be more effective than the traditional reliance on demographic profiles.

> In practice, demographic and socio-economic data have been somewhat helpful in answering the "what" and "how" questions, because such data serve, to some extent, as surrogate indicators of interests and needs. But why settle for what are at best rough indicators of interests and needs, especially if they can be complemented with more meaningful segments based on direct measurements shown to be associated with differential television-viewing behavior in particular and media behavior in general? (Frank & Greenberg, 1979, p. 51)

People use media for a variety of reasons: for information, for entertainment (including diversion) and as an adjunct to interpersonal communication. However, the major media differ in their contributions to these needs. For example, TV is seen as "fulfilling a more general surveillance function while newspaper readership is associated with specific information seeking" (Weaver & Buddenbaum, 1979). From an information-seeking perspective the media are complementary, not competitive (Budd, MacLean, & Barnes, 1966; Grotta, Larkin, & DePlois, 1975; Neuman, 1976).

Despite the prominence of uses and gratifications theory in the literature and the evidence of its validity in explaining purposeful media use and the complementary role of media, little attention has been given to advertising in this perspective (Abrams, Kaul, & Ma, 1979). Is the audience also purposeful and active, rather than passive, in its use of advertising information? Do media play complementary roles rather than competitive ones in the minds of the audience, vis-a-vis advertising? Do audiences, in keeping with the surveillance function of TV, use that medium to survey the broad array of available products? Do audiences then turn to newspapers for more specific information on products and services? In short, do audiences perceive and use the media as complementary advertising vehicles to satisfy specific needs? These questions are explored in this report, along with more traditional descriptions of the non-metro newspaper audience and the extent and effects of newspaper advertising exposure.

Methodology

The design for this study, which was sponsored by the Tennessee Press Service, was a descriptive telephone survey of 1,487 randomly selected respondents from the 91 non-metro counties in Tennessee.*

The survey population was defined as those Tennessee residents with telephones who live outside the State's four major urban areas (Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga). The sample was based upon the systematic random procedure (nth method) which permitted each telephone household an equal opportunity to be selected. The sample for each of the 91 counties was based upon population density. The sampling technique that was employed was the "subtract-a-digit" method which has been found to be more cost-effective and accurate than telephone directory samples or random-digit dialing (Fry, 1978). This method was used with each of the 217 telephone directories serving the non-metro areas of the State. Reducing the last digit by one in each selected number ensured the inclusion of unlisted numbers. The sampling error for this study was less than 3 percent, given the sample of 1,487, a confidence limit of 95 percent, and the variance for a 50-50 split in response to any item.

The dependent variables included in this study are: extent of regular newspaper readership, newspaper content preferences, newspaper advertising readership, buying decisions based upon newspaper advertising exposure, cross-media comparisons and media preferences for (1) new product information, (2) product prices, and (3) store locations.

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* The author acknowledges the assistance in this study of Ellen M. Bennett, doctoral research assistant, College of Communications, The University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

Independent variables are: standard audience characteristics including socio-cultural setting (town, rural, farm).

Data were collected in January and February, 1979. Interviewing was performed by professional interviewers of the Southern Research Company. Four call-backs were made to numbers that did not answer or did not have qualified respondents at home. No substitutions were allowed. Only adults were interviewed. The response rate was 81 percent (16 percent refused to be interviewed and 3 percent terminated the interview before completion).

Results

Nearly 8 of 10 non-metro Tennesseans regularly read a newspaper (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Non-Metro Newspaper Readership

Regular Readership	1140	(76.7%)
Non-Readers	347	(23.3%)
Total	1487	(100.0%)

There are important distinctions however between readership and audience characteristics. As shown in Table 2, readers are more likely to be married, live in a town, be 36 to 60 years old, have more than a high school diploma, have a good income, be a homeowner, a voter, and have a family. The most dramatic relationship is between income

Table 2

Newspaper Readership and Significant Non-Metro Audience Characteristics

Characteristics	Readers[1]		Non-Readers[2]		Total[2]		x^2	df	p
Marital Status									
Married	875	(78.2)	244	(21.8)	1119	(75.3)			
Not Married	264	(71.9)	103	(28.1)	367	(24.7)			
Total	1139	(76.6)	347	(23.4)	1486	(100.0)	5.71	1	.017
Community									
Urban	529	(81.4)	121	(18.6)	650	(43.7)			
Rural	373	(73.1)	137	(26.9)	510	(34.3)			
Farm	237	(72.7)	89	(27.3)	326	(21.9)			
Total	1139	(76.6)	347	(23.4)	1486	(100.0)	14.50	2	*
Age									
18-25	130	(71.4)	52	(28.6)	182	(12.7)			
26-35	238	(74.4)	82	(25.6)	320	(22.3)			
36-45	221	(82.5)	47	(17.5)	268	(18.6)			
46-60	265	(79.6)	68	(20.4)	333	(23.2)			
60+	251	(74.9)	84	(25.1)	335	(23.3)			
Total	1105	(76.8)	333	(23.2)	1438	(100.0)	10.94	4	.027
Education									
H.S. or less	751	(72.4)	287	(27.6)	1038	(71.0)			
College	373	(88.0)	51	(12.0)	424	(29.0)			
Total	1124	(76.9)	338	(23.1)	1462	(100.0)	40.45	1	*
Income									
Under $3,000	43	(43.4)	56	(56.6)	99	(8.5)			
$3,000-4,999	72	(66.1)	37	(33.9)	109	(9.3)			
$5,000-8,999	124	(74.3)	43	(25.7)	167	(14.3)			
$9,000-14,999	227	(78.0)	64	(22.0)	291	(24.9)			
$15,000-19,999	181	(81.5)	41	(18.5)	222	(19.0)			
$20,000-24,999	104	(87.4)	15	(12.6)	119	(10.2)			
$25,000-29,999	59	(92.2)	5	(7.8)	64	(5.5)			
$30,000+	96	(96.0)	4	(4.0)	100	(8.5)			
Total	906	(77.4)	265	(22.6)	1171	(100.0)	110.96	7	*
Home Ownership									
Own	954	(79.0)	253	(21.0)	1207	(82.5)			
Rent	173	(67.6)	83	(32.4)	256	(17.5)			
Total	1127	(77.0)	336	(23.0)	1463	(100.0)	15.04	1	*
Residence Type									
House	1032	(77.7)	296	(22.3)	1328	(89.5)			
Apartment	63	(65.6)	33	(34.4)	96	(6.5)			
Other	42	(70.0)	18	(30.0)	60	(4.0)			
Total	1137	(76.6)	347	(23.4)	1484	(100.0)	8.83	2	.01
Voted Last Election									
Yes	834	(82.7)	174	(17.3)	1008	(75.6)			
No	185	(56.9)	140	(43.1)	325	(24.4)			
Total	1019	(76.4)	314	(23.6)	1333	(100.0)	89.52	1	.01
Family Size									
One	127	(67.2)	62	(32.8)	189	(12.7)			
Two	389	(76.3)	121	(23.7)	510	(34.3)			
Three	247	(80.7)	59	(19.3)	306	(20.6)			
Four	224	(80.3)	55	(19.7)	279	(18.8)			
Five or more	152	(75.2)	50	(24.8)	202	(13.6)			
Total	1139	(76.6)	347	(23.4)	1486	(100.0)	14.59	4	*

[1] Percentages in parentheses

[2] Unequal totals due to selective non-response

* Significance level less than .01

and readership. While only 43.4 percent of those who earn less than $3,000 per year are regular newspaper readers, 96 percent of those earning $30,000 or more are regular readers.

Advertising exposure in non-metro newspapers is consistently high across audience characteristics. Regular readership of ads ranked fifth--behind only the front page, state news, national news, and local government news--in an array of 15 content items (Table 3). Sex was the only audience characteristic with a significantly distinct relationship to advertising readership in that more than 86 percent of female readers (as opposed to 68 percent of male readers) reported regular use of newspaper advertising (Table 4).

Newspaper advertising's utility in non-metro markets was explored by determining what one thing readers would "miss most" if their newspaper were no longer available. Of the 12 content items specified by the readers, display advertising ranked fourth, behind local news, sports, news, and national news. Want ads ranked fifth (Table 5).

Although regular ad readership is reported by 77 percent of the non-metro readers (Table 4), the persuasiveness of newspaper advertising was acknowledged by nearly 85 percent of the non-metro readers who reported regular or occasional buying decisions based on newspaper advertising exposure (Table 6). Some readers who don't report regular readership of advertising nonetheless report being influenced by it.

There is compelling evidence from this study to support both the notion of purposeful use of advertising media by the audience and the complementary role of the media. Table 7 shows that TV is the clear choice as the preferred source for information on new products. However,

TABLE 3

Newspaper Content Preferences of Non-Metro Readers

Item Read	Rank	Frequency	% of 1140 Readers
"Front page"	1	1110	97.4
"Tennessee news"	2	1013	88.9
"National news"	3	915	80.3
"Local government news"	4	883	77.6
"Advertisements"	5	882	77.4
"TV log or entertainment news"	6	815	71.6
"Editorial page"	7	799	70.1
"Letters to editor"	8	749	65.8
"Religious news"	9	712	62.5
"Want ads"	10	695	61.0
"Business news"	11	616	54.0
"Sports news"	12	613	53.8
"Society news"	13	599	52.7
"Comic pages"	14	520	45.6
"Legal or public notices"	15	502	44.0

Table 4

Newspaper Advertising Readership and Non-Metro Audience Characteristics

Characteristics	Readers[1]		Non-Readers[2]		Total[2]		x^2	df	p
Marital Status									
Married	666	(76.1)	209	(23.9)	875	(76.8)			
Not Married	216	(81.8)	48	(18.2)	264	(23.2)			
Total	882	(77.4)	257	(22.6)	1139	(100.0)	3.46	1	.06
Community									
Urban	413	(78.1)	116	(21.9)	529	(46.4)			
Rural	281	(73.3)	92	(24.7)	373	(32.7)			
Farm	188	(79.3)	49	(20.7)	237	(20.8)			
Total	882	(77.4)	257	(22.6)	1139	(100.0)	1.55	2	.46
Age									
18-25	108	(83.1)	22	(16.9)	130	(11.8)			
26-35	183	(76.9)	55	(23.1)	238	(21.5)			
36-45	160	(72.1)	62	(27.9)	222	(20.1)			
46-60	210	(79.5)	54	(20.9)	264	(23.9)			
60+	190	(75.7)	61	(24.3)	251	(22.7)			
Total	851	(77.0)	254	(23.0)	1105	(100.0)	6.97	4	.14
Education									
H.S. or less	593	(78.9)	159	(21.1)	752	(66.9)			
College	276	(74.2)	96	(25.8)	372	(33.1)			
Total	869	(77.3)	255	(22.7)	1124	(100.0)	2.82	1	.09
Income									
Under $3,000	32	(74.4)	11	(25.6)	43	(4.7)			
$3,000-4,999	63	(87.5)	9	(12.5)	72	(7.9)			
$5,000-8,999	101	(81.5)	23	(18.5)	124	(13.7)			
$9,000-14,999	178	(78.1)	50	(21.9)	228	(25.2)			
$15,000-19,999	146	(80.7)	35	(19.3)	181	(20.0)			
$20,000-24,999	75	(72.1)	29	(27.9)	104	(11.5)			
$25,000-29,999	48	(82.8)	10	(17.2)	58	(6.4)			
$30,000+	67	(69.8)	29	(30.2)	96	(10.6)			
Total	710	(78.4)	196	(21.6)	906	(100.0)	12.43	7	.08
Sex									
Male	377	(68.1)	177	(31.9)	554	(48.7)			
Female	504	(86.4)	79	(13.6)	583	(51.3)			
Total	881	(77.5)	256	(22.5)	1137	(100.0)	54.07	1	*
Home Ownership									
Own	730	(76.6)	223	(23.4)	953	(84.6)			
Rent	144	(82.8)	30	(17.2)	174	(15.4)			
Total	874	(77.6)	253	(22.4)	1127	(100.0)	2.86	1	.09
Residence Type									
House	794	(76.9)	238	(23.1)	1032	(90.8)			
Apartment	53	(84.1)	10	(15.9)	63	(5.5)			
Other	33	(78.6)	9	(21.4)	42	(3.7)			
Total	880	(77.4)	257	(22.6)	1137	(100.0)	1.79	2	.41
Family Size									
One	100	(78.7)	27	(21.3)	127	(11.2)			
Two	302	(77.6)	87	(22.4)	389	(34.2)			
Three	192	(77.7)	55	(22.3)	247	(21.7)			
Four	170	(75.9)	54	(24.1)	224	(19.7)			
Five or more	118	(77.6)	34	(22.4)	152	(13.3)			
Total	882	(77.4)	257	(22.6)	1139	(100.0)	0.45	4	.98

[1] Percentages in parentheses

[2] Unequal totals due to selective non-response

* Significance level less than .01

TABLE 5

Items Missed Most if Newspaper not Available

Items	Rank	Frequency	% of 1140 Readers
Local news	1	240	21.1
Sports news	2	134	11.8
National news	3	93	8.2
Advertisements	4	92	8.1
Want ads	5	50	4.4
Entertainment news	6	38	3.3
Comics	7	37	3.3
Editorial page	8*	28	2.5
Tennessee news	8*	28	2.5
Society news	9	16	1.4
Religious news	10	5	0.4
Business news	11	3	0.3
Don't know		123	10.8
Other		249	21.9

*tie

TABLE 6

Buying Decisions Based Upon Newspaper Advertising

Extent of Buying Decision	Frequency	% of 1140 Readers
Regularly	248	21.8
Occasionally	716	63.0
Never	159	14.0
Don't know	14	1.2

TABLE 7

Sources Preferred for Various Types of Product Information

Type of Product Information	Media Preference Frequency and (%) of 1140 Readers				
	Newspapers	TV	Radio	Magazines	Don't Know or Other
New product information	288 (25.3)	463 (40.7)	26 (2.3)	191 (16.8)	170 (14.9)
Costs of products	703 (61.9)	106 (9.3)	25 (2.2)	67 (5.9)	235 (20.7)
Where to shop	844 (74.2)	65 (5.7)	50 (4.4)	16 (1.4)	162 (14.2)

for more specific advertising information, "cost of products" and "where to shop," the newspaper was the overwhelming preference.

From these data it appears that TV advertising is used as a form of general surveillance of products and services while newspapers are used to obtain more specific information. Newspapers and TV, in this context, are complementary advertising media, not competitive.

Conclusions and Implications

The newspaper is an important communications medium to non-metro audiences. The non-metro newspaper market is extensive and of high scoio-economic quality. Advertising exposure is high. Advertising content is widely read and persuasively effective. Finally, non-metro readers use the advertising in various media, particularly TV and newspapers, deliberately and purposively by capitalizing on their complementary qualities.

Two important implications arise from this study. First, advertisers would be unwise to ignore the non-metro newspaper audience which is sizeable, of high quality, and predisposed to the value of advertising. Secondly, advertising content, in both TV and newspapers, should be designed in accordance with the perceived complementary characteristics of the media . . . TV is used to survey the broad array of products and services and newspapers are used to obtain more specific information.

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